

19 December 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR: Senior Review Panel Members

FROM: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Report on a Study of Intelligence Judgments
Preceding Significant Historical Failures:
The Hazards of Single-Outcome Forecasting

1. I compliment you on your study of intelligence judgments preceding significant historical failures. I think that the broad perspective you provided in your identification of single-outcome forecasting as the root of the problem is right on the nose.

2. However, you have done such a good job and developed so much background that I am asking you to go a little further by focusing in on specific turning points within some of the episodes with which you dealt broadly and determine whether we saw what was happening and where it could lead, whether we raised the question, whether we speculated on alternative possibility and what that speculation might have been, whether there was any evidence indicating the actual eventuality, where we missed it, what we should have looked for. For example, you provided an assessment of overall problems on Vietnam. What I would like to see added to that is a focus on the specific judgments made at turning points; the evidence and analysis provided at a critical point in time or on a specific development which actually occurred--could it have been foreseen--what evidence was there, what should have been looked for, which speculations in retrospect were reasonable and were they put forward?

3. For example, when North Vietnam launched its offensive in 1975, did we think they were going to Saigon or did we tell ourselves they had limited objectives? In the latter point was the speculation ever raised? When did the evidence of the ultimate objective accumulate?

4. Similarly, did we speculate the Soviets were going to control Afghanistan, that the Shah was finished and what the alternative outcomes might be, what the alternatives to Somoza might be? Menges did a study on Cuba and Nicaragua which addressed some of these questions.

5. To see whether you can do what I am now asking, I suggest concentrating on the decision in North Vietnam to go for Saigon, the decision of the Soviets to take control of Afghanistan, and perhaps the decision of the North to intervene in South Vietnam. We'll wait on Cuba and Nicaragua until we see how much help is available from the Menges exercise.


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7. On page 4 of Tab B on the likelihood of all-out Soviet support of Hanoi, I present these questions relevant to the further analysis for which I am now asking:

- Was there not a significant escalation of Soviet support subsequent to 1965?
- When did USSR become the primary supplier?
- What were we saying about them from 1965 to 1975?


William J. Casey